

HELSINGIN KAUPPAKORKEAKOULU

Kansainvälisten toimintojen koulutusohjelma



BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL COMPANY IMAGE

- A Study of Finnish Hotels and Hotel Chains

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KTT JUUKA SAPPINEN, ASS. MATTI TUOMINEN

BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL COMPANY IMAGE
- A STUDY OF FINNISH HOTELS AND HOTEL CHAINS

[Kansainvälisen yrityskuvan luominen - tutkimus suomalaisista hotelleista ja hotelliketjuista]

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan suomalaisten hotelliyritysten kansainvälistä yrityskuvaa ja sen muodostumista. Tavoitteena on tutkia, mitkä seikat vaikuttavat palveluyrityksen kansainvälisen yrityskuvan muodostumiseen sekä vertailla yksittäisten hotellien ja hotelliketjujen kansainvälisen yritysimagonsa luomisessa käyttämiä keinoja.

Lähdeaineisto

Tutkimuksen alkuosa koostuu kirjallisuustutkimuksesta mielikuvan muodostumisen, yrityskuvan luomisen ja palveluyritysten erityispiirteiden alalta. Empiiriset tiedot tutkimusta varten on kerätty haastatteluiden ja kyselykaavakkeiden avulla valituilta suomalaisilta hotelliyrityksiltä.

Tutkimusmenetelmät

Tutkimusta varten kohdeyritykset jaettiin kahteen ryhmään: hotelliketjuihin ja ketjuihin kuulumattomiin hotelleihin. Ryhmiä vertaillaan keskenään, mutta tutkittavien yritysten rajoitetun määrän johdosta varsinaista tilastollista tutkimusta ei tehdä. Tutkittavat yritykset olivat niin samankaltaisia, että yksityiskohtaiset case-tutkimukset eivät ole tarkoituksenmukaisia.

Tulokset ja päätelmät

Yrityskuvan kehitystä tarkasteltaessa havaittiin, että hotelliketjujen imagoon vaikuttavat lähinnä ketjuun kuuluvat yksittäiset hotellit sekä ulkoinen markkinointiviestintä. Itsenäisten hotellien yrityskuvan kannalta tärkeimpiä ovat sijainti sekä henkilökunnan palvelualttius. Kansainvälisen yrityskuvan luomiseksi käytetyt keinot rajoittuvat molemmilla ryhmillä usein markkinointiviestintään, varsinkin esitteitä käytetään yleisesti tätä tarkoitusta varten. Ryhmien välillä ei ollut merkittäviä eroja. Tutkituilla yrityksillä ei usein ollut varsinaista ohjelmaa kansainvälisen yrityskuvansa luomiseksi.

Avainsanat

kansainvälinen yrityskuva, palveluyritykset, hotellit, hotelliketjut

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I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ERIC FOR HIS PRESENCE -

AND ALL MY FRIENDS FOR THEIR PATIENCE...

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

While the Finnish hotel industry has gone through a difficult period during the recent depression, the number of foreign visitors has been growing steadily. In recent months, this growth has been slower, but the emergence of new international customer groups gives hope of a more prosperous future. In addition, a lot of effort is put into making Finland more attractive to foreign tourists, both by governmental and private organizations.

Parallel to this, a growing number of companies have come to realize that the purchase-decision of a consumer is not based solely on the price or the direct benefits stemming from using a certain product, but rather on the image that the consumer has about it, or about the company behind it.

A good company image is particularly significant to a service company, since the quality of a service offer cannot usually be separated from that of the company providing it. Lately, a negative experience of Finnish service quality by a group of British tourists has, once again, brought to the general attention the importance of having a good image; and the threat of losing it.

The study begins with a discussion on the company image as a whole, and goes on to examine the ways in which hotels and hotel chains try to build an international company image.

1.2. Objectives

The study aims at discussing the way in which service companies view their image building process. The main objective is finding out how service companies try to influence their image

The main question of the study is the following:

What means do the Finnish hotels and hotel chains use in order to create an international company image?

In addition to the main question, the following questions will be examined.

1. What factors influence the international image of a service company ?
2. How is an image formed?

In order to discuss the factors influencing the company image, it was deemed necessary to first examine the psychological process of image formation in the human mind. This is done in Chapter 2. The factors influencing the company image are discussed in Chapter 3. Since service marketing is quite unlike goods marketing, the special characteristics of services are examined in Chapter 4. In this chapter, an additional overview of hotels and hotel chains is given.

In Chapter 5, the framework of the study, based on the preceding discussion, is presented. The empirical part is based on this framework. Chapter 6 consists of the presentation of the methodology of the study. In Chapter 7, the empirical results are presented. A conclusion based on the results is drawn in Chapter 8.

1.3. Limitations

This study concentrates on discussing the image building activities of selected Finnish hotels and hotel chains. The longer process of changing an existing company image is excluded from the study. Only the image building efforts aimed at existing and potential international customers will be examined.

1.4. Definitions

The concept of company image is often very loosely and confusedly stated. In some studies, the concept of company image is used interchangeably with that of the company identity. Most authors, however, make a clear distinction between these two concepts.

Company Identity

Company identity is defined as the sum of all the ways in which a company chooses to identify itself to all its publics (Bernstein, 13). It is the expressed personality of the company, which can be quickly observed. It is often represented in the form of a logotype, color or permanent slogan used in external and internal communication. Company identity is controllable, and it can be created on a drawing board. (Selame) Identity is, therefore, something that can be directly influenced by the company.

Company Image

Company image, on the other hand, is the perception of the company by its publics. Its nature is gradual and evolutionary, and it is made up of small, often unrelated parts. Image cannot be directly controlled by the company. It can, however, be influenced. Often, a company uses

its image for differentiation and positioning purposes in the minds of its target audiences. (Markkanen)

Some authors make an additional distinction between the concept of company image and that of company reputation. According to them, the main difference between these concepts is that while a reputation implies an evaluation of some sort, an image is more neutral in character. (Bromley). In this study, no distinction is made between these two concepts. In the following chapter, image formation and management will be examined in more detail.

In this study, a **hotel chain** indicates a chain of hotels owned and controlled by a central chain organization. A **marketing chain**, on the other hand, consists of privately-owned hotels, loosely grouped together for marketing and / or reservation purposes.

Products include both physical goods and services.

2. COMPANY IMAGE

2.1. Introduction

In order to examine how a company image is created, it is necessary to discuss how images are formed in the human mind. A number of models have been created to explain the human perception of companies.

Several authors have studied the question of image formation. According to Bernstein, an image is the net result of the interaction of all the experiences, beliefs and impressions that people have about an object. (Bernstein,40) Rope and Methner (1987) have expanded the model to include the individual's value system, prejudices, attitudes, observations and all the information given to him about the object. Of these, the value system and prejudices are very difficult to change. All of the others can be influenced in several ways.

Experiences and **observations** stem directly from the products and services of the company. They may include marketing, financial or social performance and the personnel of the company. In order for a good image to be achieved, these experiences should be positive.

Impressions are closely connected with a person's experiences of the company. If strong enough, they, in turn, may influence attitudes and beliefs. **Feelings** may be influenced by advertising, and several companies use image advertising to this end. (Rope & Methner)

Values are gradually formed of attitudes which we have learned to be acceptable and right. Values direct the selection of our goals and also regulate the methods and manners that we use in achieving them. While it is almost impossible for it to be influenced, the value system of

the individual is of a great importance. In order for it to be persuasive and accepted, any attempt to influence a person should be in accordance with his value system. (Marston)

2.2. Models of Image formation

2.2.1. Summary Construct Hypothesis

Several models on how the image formation process evolves have been constructed. Min Han (1989,223) presents the summary construct hypothesis. According to this model, an image is a summary construct combining individual information-, behavior- and emotion-related factors into higher-order units. The model suggest that beliefs influence image who, in turn, influences the attitudes a person has about the object.



Figure 1. The Summary Construct Hypothesis. (adapted from Min Han, 224)

In this model, an image is not a single independent factor in consumer behavior, but rather a combination of various cognitive, affective and conative factors. (Ranta & Törnroos,6)

2.2.2. Halo Model

According to the halo hypothesis, the images produce attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes related to the object. Attitudes and beliefs, therefore, do not precede images, but images precede them. (Min Han, 222-224)

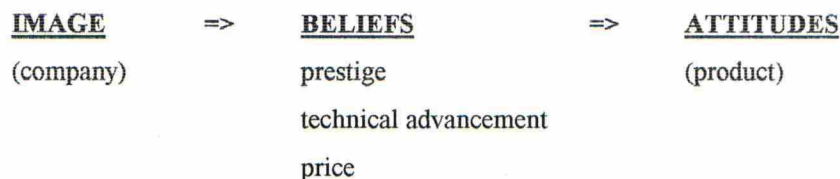


Figure 2. The Halo Hypothesis. (adapted from Min Han, 224)

Min Han studies the validity of these two models with regard to country and product images. The findings of his study show that when the consumers are not very familiar with a country's products, the country image may be used by the consumers to infer product attributes and quality, and indirectly affect the brand attitudes. As consumers become familiar with the country's products, the country image may summarize a consumer's beliefs about product attributes, and directly affect their brand attitude. (Min Han, 228).

2.2.3. Other Models

In addition to the models described in the previous section, Hong and Wyer present several hypotheses related to the evaluation of an object. These include:

1. The encoding hypothesis, which maintains that concepts and knowledge affecting the interpretation of product attribute information may be activated by image.
2. Using the origin of a product as a basis for evaluation without considering information about the product's specific attributes. This hypothesis is similar to the halo hypothesis presented by Min Han.
3. A hypothesis arguing that the information received first will have the strongest influence on judgements.
4. The cognitive elaboration hypothesis, maintaining that a prior awareness of a product's origin may stimulate the subject's interest in the product. (Hong & Wyer, 176-184)

2.3. Collective Image Formation

Most authors seem to agree that the individuals are strongly influenced by their peers, i.e. members of the same social groups. These groups may create an image of an object amongst themselves. The opinion of a public is often assumed to be the sum total of the opinions of the individuals comprising that public. In reality, it is formed as a result of interaction between the group members. Public opinion may vary among groups, because of the interaction of the individuals within each group. A person usually belongs to a number of groups, who all may have a slightly different image of a company or of an object. In addition, the amount of influence of an individual in a group may vary, with the group leaders usually having a strong influence. The collective image of a group will evolve when the group interacts with other groups.(Marston)

2.4. Primary and Secondary Image

The image of a company in the mind of the individual can be divided into two categories.

1. The primary image includes direct experience of the company or of its products. This image can be more varied, since the images based on actual experience tend to be more individualised, and therefore different in nature.

2. The secondary image does not necessitate direct experiences of the company, and it is based more on hearsay. Information and influence are generated in and flow through social networks. Secondary impressions are likely to be simple and stereotyped, conforming to the prevailing opinion. (Bromley). In Figure 3, the formation of a primary and a secondary image is demonstrated. Person A, who has direct

experiences about the company, is affected by psychological factors. He then interacts with his social group, and his opinion influences the group image. Person B, who has no direct experience of the company, forms his company image based on his interaction with the social group. The company image held by Person B may change after he gains actual first-hand experience of the object.

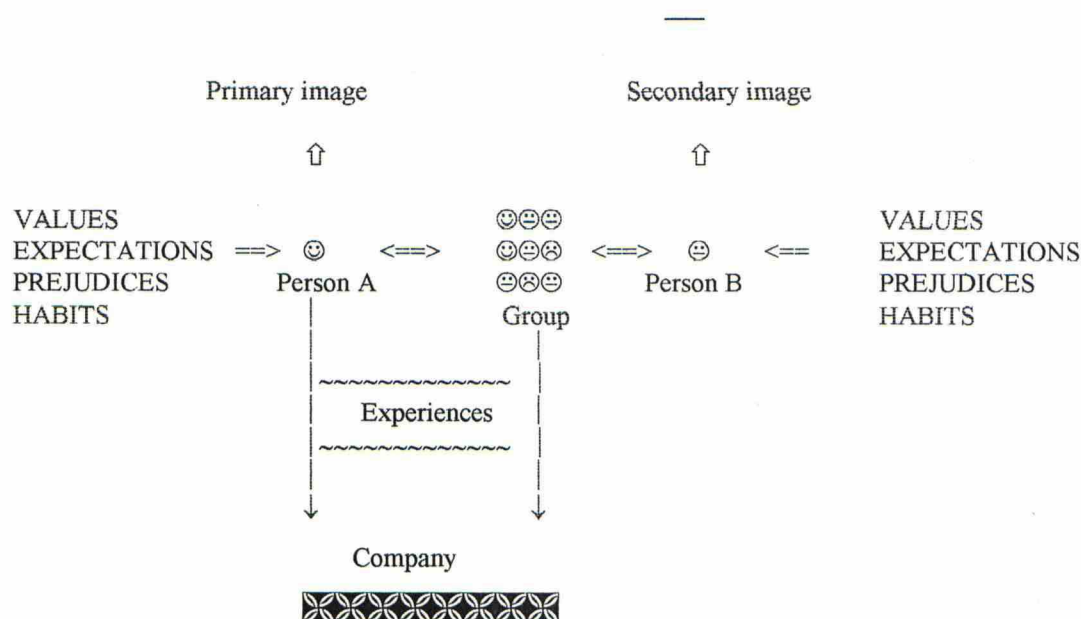


Figure 3. Primary and Secondary Image formation

2.5. Corporate and Local Image

Some large organizations, such as multinational companies, consisting of a large number of subsidiary organizations, may have several localized images in each of their geographical areas. Whereas a person may have different reputations in different groups, a conglomerate is best thought of as a system of interrelated entities, each with its own identity and reputation. The organizations as a whole might find it difficult to coordinate a multiplicity of activities, identities and reputations.

Communication and influence at an international level are different, in some ways at least, from local communication and influence. The international company image may differ considerably from the domestic one, and the tools used in domestic image building may be inappropriate abroad. (Czinkota et al.) This arises from the differences in culture and language, as well as in the beliefs and values. This makes barriers to effective communication even greater. Bromley (1993) argues that personal impressions have an important role in the international image formation.

2.6. Importance of Good Company Image

Most of the authors agree on the benefits that the company can have, both internally and externally, by having a good image. A high internal image boosts employee morale and strengthens their belief in the company, as well as their loyalty towards it. A good image usually lowers the rate of absenteeism and employee turnover. The reputation of the company is perhaps its most important asset, one which must be protected and managed on a daily basis. It is on the basis of this image that a company maintains the right to continue to market its goods and services (Davis, 16).

In addition, a favorable image may lead to the ability to choose among a larger number of potential employees and to hire outstanding people both for top-level and for employee-level positions (Govoni et al.). According to Wouters (1991), no reputation can be an asset as well as being a liability. She argues that credibility starts with little things, such as timeliness. A bigger size usually implies power, which is generally appreciated by the publics.

A good company image is important to customer relations. In an era of rapid technological change, people are increasingly valuing non-

functional benefits. Consumers' choice, therefore, depends less on the functional benefits of a good or a service, and more on the clients' assessment of the people in the company behind it. Images are especially relevant for business firms as the tangible differences between products become smaller with the increasing speed of technology diffusion. Services and complex or expensive products are often bought based solely on the reputation of the manufacturer. (King)

In addition, people are often more willing to buy from companies which they already know. A good reputation in the eyes of the consumer also leads to the possibility of charging higher prices for the product. Furthermore, a company with a good image finds it easier to secure financing or to sell stock. Having a good image is important for a firm when dealing with the various government bodies. (Saffir, 96) A company with a good reputation may also find it easier to operate not only locally, but in the global marketplace.

Some authors argue that an unfavorable image is more of a handicap than a favorable image is an assurance of success, and that a company with a bad image may experience more labor difficulties or governmental friction, as well as problems with sales and financing. When a corporation gets a bad image, that image casts a shadow over the company's products, no matter their actual quality. (Saffir) A good image, however, is no substitute for good products or good management. (Marston)

3. EXTERNAL FACTORS OF IMAGE FORMATION

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the psychological factors influencing the formation of a company image were described. In the following pages, external factors perceived by the publics in the company's operating environment will be discussed. These include both those which the company can influence by its actions and those outside of its control.

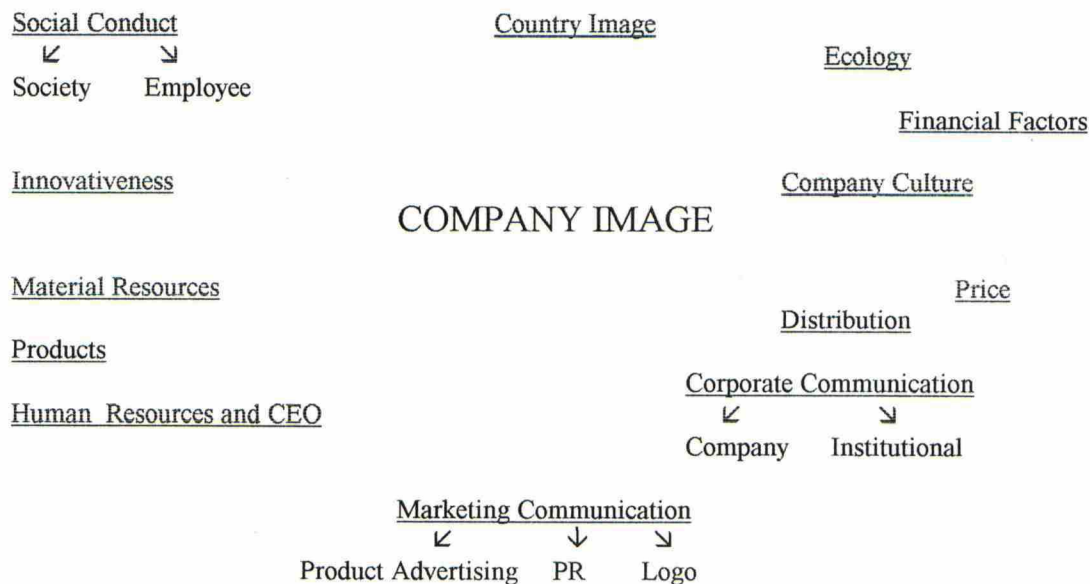


Figure 4. Factors influencing company image formation

3.2. Social Performance

With the changing ethical standards of the modern society, as demonstrated by the raised ecological consciousness, the company's social performance has become more and more important. Social performance includes the activities and the importance of the company in society. These are represented by the corporation's social and business conduct. The social conduct comprises the environmental

and the community responsibility of the company, the societal benefits from its products, as well as the way in which the company contributes to the general well-being and quality of life. The company contributions conduct, as demonstrated by the donations to charities and educational or cultural programs, can be included under this concept. (Kotler & Barich)

A part of the social performance is the company's behavior demonstrated towards its employees. This corporate employees conduct (Kotler & Barich) includes the respect of the company for its employees, the salary that they receive and the advancement possibilities that they have. The size and the structure of the company and its importance to the society may also influence the company image. (Garbett, 4).

3.3. Environmental Performance

The environmental performance can be measured by the environmental impact of the company, or of the product or services it provides, or by the environmental spills or disasters experienced by the company. The possible impacts include:

1. Those of the raw materials and energy, products or waste
2. Impacts on the air, the water, the land, the people or other living things and
3. The impacts from purchasing, marketing, production, engineering or distribution. (Sadgrove, 24)

The environmental performance is, therefore, related to all levels of the company, comprising the office and the factory, as well as the distributors or transportation. Plant accidents, spills, and disasters may affect the corporate image in a very drastic way. The effect on the image is partly dependent on the number of occurrences and, in

particular, on the way the crisis is handled by the company. (Sadgrove, Marconi) According to a recent Finnish study, 66% of customers pay attention to the way in which recycling is organized and to the extent to which environmentally-friendly products and materials are used in hotels. (Lankinen)

3.4. Financial Performance

In their study of corporate reputation, Sobol and Farrell used past financial data to find out whether corporate reputation is merely the reflection of financial performance. Financial performance includes financial soundness, stock price and the value of the company as an investment. Consistently good performance is essential to the company reputation. The authors discovered that while financial performance is important in determining the corporate image, there are differences between industries, as well as other factors, such as the age of the firm; the product life cycle; and PR activities contributing to the image. One of their main findings is that companies with larger market shares usually have the highest overall reputations. (Sobol, Farrell & Taper) According to them, the firms often rent the image of outside auditors to enhance their own image.

3.5. Corporate Communication

Corporate communication consists of institutional and company communication, with the concept of an institution viewed as a more abstract one than that of a company. **Institutional communication** is used to inform about the mission of the company, and to demonstrate the firm's contributions to the general well-being in the society. **Company communication**, on the other hand, is aimed at presenting

the ways in which the company achieves its economic and social goals as a producer in the society. In order to achieve this, a reference is made to the human and financial resources of the company. (Brun,32) Corporate communication can be done by using any of the available media.

3.6. Marketing communication

Marketing communication can be roughly divided into three categories: advertising; corporate identity and public relations activities.

3.6.1. Advertising

Advertising can be defined as any paid form of nonpersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor. (Kotler 1988, 587) This can be done in the form of print or broadcast advertisements, brochures or billboards. Advertising is most frequently used in promoting individual products or services. In the long run, advertising enhances and, to some extent, forms company image. In the short run, it can influence the company image by creating expectations of the product quality. (Lovelock)

Institutional or corporate advertising seeks to promote the image of the organization as a whole, rather than that of a particular product or service. The primary objective is to communicate the favorable attributes or the position of the company in a consistent and credible manner to its various publics.

Garbett (1988) points out that while corporate advertising is an expensive form of communication, it is able to build recognition more rapidly than any other controllable force. The trade-offs, however, between control, cost and credibility are quite different. With

institutional advertising, the control over the message and format, as well as over the timing and placement, lie with the company. On the other hand, there are significant media and production costs and an important, perhaps critical, reduction in the credibility of the message, because it is clearly commercially sponsored.

Institutional advertising can be divided into categories depending on the primary audience targeted:

1. Sales-related or patronage advertising, where the audience are the prospective buyers and users of the products and services of the company. This type of advertising aims at convincing the buyers that the company is reputable and responsible to do business with. The aim here is at long-term product sales. This type of corporate advertising is used both to alter the company image and to modify the market to accept a new product category. Sales-related corporate advertising is used mainly for complex, innovative products, and its use seems to increase during economic crises.
2. Financial corporate advertising is used to convince capital sources and their advisers that the company provides an attractive investment opportunity, and attractive financing rates. This is perhaps the most widely used category of corporate advertising.
3. Advocacy or issue advertising is used by associations and corporations to present their views on various social issues, such as smoking or environmental protection.
4. Goodwill advertising or industrial advertising aims at making the public feel good about the company.
5. Hybrid corporate advertising is a combination of these categories, usually of financial and sales-related advertising. (Govoni et al.)

3.6.2. Corporate identity

This type of communication includes the use of certain uniform symbols in communicating the personality of the company. These may include a logo, standardized brochures or other symbols. In communicating a corporate identity, it is important that distinctiveness, consistency and stability are maintained. (Markkanen)

3.6.3. Public Relations

Public relations is often defined as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success depends (Cutlip et al.). PR is a linkage between policy and action. It can be used in deciding whether to enter a market in providing information beforehand, as well as in understanding the local community and political structures. The primary objective of public relations is to establish and to enhance a positive image of the company. (Wouters)

The main difference between advertising and public relations is that while advertising aims to persuade and to sell, and the advertiser has control over appearance, PR aims at achieving mutual understanding. (Jefkins)

Authors seem to disagree to a great extent on the activities included in public relations. Some argue that public relations is synonymous with press agency, and that it aims at maintaining good media relations and at keeping the name of the company constantly in the public's eye. Other authors feel that public relations includes several different activities.

Kotler defines public relations as a part of the concept of megamarketing. According to him, this concept consists of the four

main elements of the marketing mix: product, price, distribution and promotion, along with power and public relations. He argues that this type of strategy should be used when entering protected or blocked markets, i.e. markets that are characterized by high entry barriers. According to the author, power is a push strategy, destined to win the support of influential publics to facilitate entry into these markets. His definition of power is close to the definition of lobbying. Kotler defines public relations as a pull strategy, which is used to influence the public opinion of a company in a certain country. Public relations activities here include social, cultural and sports sponsorship and media relations (Kotler 1986).

Publicity is a form of public relations which consists of providing the media with news about the company. Publicity is unpaid, and therefore the sources have little or no control over how, if, or when the news is presented. Usually, the source is not identified in this form of public relations. Some forms of publicity may include company publications or films. Publicity is often used in the form of introducing new products or personnel activities. (Govoni et al.)

Advertising in the context of public relations does not include traditional advertising for marketing purposes. It may include job advertisements or corporate advertising. This form of public relations is used by companies to reach audiences other than those targeted by marketing, or when the company is not satisfied what is being said in the media about its activities. (Cutlip et al.)

Public affairs is the specialized part of public relations that builds and maintains mutually beneficial governmental and local community relations. Community activities may include fund drives and the presence of the CEO in the boards of non-profit organizations.

Lobbying is the part of public affairs, which attempts to influence legislative and regulatory decisions in the government. (Cutlip et al.)

Investor relations is the specialized part of corporate public relations that builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships with shareholders and others in the financial community.

The concepts of **events management** includes exhibitions, open houses, conferences and speeches. It is aimed at either the general public or at a target audience of prospective consumers. If a company is new to an area, a special event is a good way to develop further contacts, to introduce and to entertain important people, or to build networks. (Wouters, 63) General or specialized trade shows can be very useful to a company for visibility and contact reasons. If nothing else, they are an effective way to study the competitors.

Sometimes even **sponsorship** is included as a part of the concept of events management. Some authors strongly disagree on whether or not sponsorship is actually a part of public relations activities or not. In this study, sponsorship is included as a part of the concept of public relations. Sponsorship includes both *pure sponsorship* and *patronage*.

The difference between these two forms is that the *patronage* activity is predominantly a supportive activity, done for purely cultural or scientific interest, while pure sponsorship has a distinctly economic interest for the sponsor. (Jolly)

Dominique Jolly (1991) examines the strategy of patronage from a societal point of view, and comes to the conclusion that patronage is widely used to demonstrate the social sensibility of the company. He argues that in order for it to be effective, patronage should be in

accordance with the company culture. It is also a good way for a company to be noticed and accepted.

Sponsorship usually has two strategic goals for a company: it can support the corporate culture by identifications with the sponsored activity, and it can also serve as a corporate communications tool both for internal and external publics. Sponsorship is also characterized by a relationship of exchange, where both partners contribute to and benefit from the relationship. (Zentes & Deimel).

The truthfulness and character of the advertising of a product, whether new or existing, has a profound effect of the company reputation and, through ripple effects, on all of the company's activities. (Barich & Kotler, Davis)

3.7. Other Elements of the Marketing Mix

Marketing mix is the set of marketing tools that the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target market. (Kotler 1988) The elements of marketing mix include the product or service offered, its price, distribution channels, the marketing communication, and after-sales service and support provided.

Barich and Kotler (1991) include the elements of the company's marketing mix, along with the perceived quality of the company's products and services, under the concept of marketing image. According to the authors, a corporate image and a marketing image play a different role. Marketing image is the image which any existing or potential customers have of the company's products. In contrast, a corporate image is the image of stockholders or employees of the company.

Different **pricing** strategies can be used to support the chosen product strategy. Often, the price level, as well as the different reductions, special offers, and financial terms influence the product or the brand image in a significant way. Many products or services have achieved a luxury image, due to their high price. Price affects both expectations and perceptions of quality and the organization's ability to produce quality services. (Palmer)

The consumers often view that a higher price reflects a higher quality, which they are willing to pay for. If the higher price is not accepted, and it provokes animosity amongst the consumers, it has to be lowered. If the price is too low, the product may be thought of as being of an inferior quality. This will, ultimately, affect its image, and, in the long run, that of the company behind it. (Palmer)

The **intermediaries**, their number and characteristics, can be an important factor in determining the image of a product. As is with the employees of the company itself, those working for the distributors may, by their behavior and competence, have an influence on the brand image. The motivation and the conditions of sale of the distributors are a factor to be considered.

It is important that the chosen marketing channels correspond to the brand image. Accordingly, for a simple, everyday product intensive distribution would be preferable, enabling maximum exposure through a large number of dealers. For a luxury product, exclusive distribution through a very limited number of outlets is a way of enhancing the prestige image of the brand and of the company. (Kotler, 1988)

3.8. Product Image

The goods and services of the company, and their images influence the overall company image. The authors, however, seem to disagree on the extent of this influence. Some say that if the products offered are not closely tied with the company, their influence on the image is quite small. This is often the case for large multinational companies. (Bernstein)

On the other hand, some scholars argue that it is not just the image of the company's products and brands, but that of the product categories offered that affect the company image. (Barich & Kotler) Chemicals and other environmentally hazardous products, weapons, and products causing a feeling of guilt in their users may damage the company image. (Sadgrove)

A **brand image**, like a corporate one, is not a single entity. Brand image is an impression which the consumer has of the brand, a synthesis of many impressions, as a direct or indirect result of a variety of signals transmitted by the brand. (Bernstein, 12). Brand images have a special significance for products that are widely and regularly used, or that require a big investment. The less similarities there are between the competing products, the more important a brand image is.

Brand-building aims at creating a lasting personality for a good or a service, based on a special combination of physical, functional and psychological values. (King) Products offer solutions to three types of needs:

1. **Functional needs** can be met by benefits that stem directly from product features. These include its perceived value for money, performance, design, quality, durability, number of product recalls,

reparability or the innovative nature of the product. Since the formation of an image is a complex process, where indirect exposure to the product, or hearsay, may play a significant role, the communication on product quality between the customers is an important consideration.

2. There are many products for which differentiation among product attributes is either insignificant or non-existent. This may be true of technically simpler products or of products whose purchase-decision is quickly made by the consumers. In addition, many **symbolic needs**, such as the perceived prestige value, are important when the consumer makes a choice between certain categories of products. For such products, the position arises from broad symbolism rather than specific product performance. Brand images do not emerge from product attributes, but from associations with the moods or feelings projected from advertisements. (Govoni et al., 110-111)

3. In a highly competitive setting, a product may not be successful simply by being distinctive. It may have to convince consumers explicitly that it has **advantages** over competitors' products. An image can be established using the competitors' position as a reference point. (Govoni et al., 111)

3.9. Internal Resources

Internal resources, such as the **human** and **material resources** of the company, have an important effect on the company image. The professionalism, flexibility and friendliness demonstrated by the personnel may have a large impact on the company image, especially if it is lacking and does not support the communication effort. The rapidity of service and the size and coverage of the sales force may be an additional influence on the image. (King) For service companies,

the influence of personnel is even more important than to goods companies.

The corporate image is often personified in the **CEO**. The influence of the management on the company image varies greatly between the companies. The main ways in which the CEO builds the image are through his management style, personality and behavior. Often, the stronger and more original the behavior of the president, the more distinctive his influence on the company image. Behavior includes public appearances and the way of speaking (Garbett, Sobol et al.)

The **company culture** has a certain impact on the overall company image. The culture is defined as the leading value system of the company, according to which the company is run. It influences the atmosphere and, in the long run, the productiveness of the firm. The company culture is often projected externally. It is important that the company culture is in accordance with the culture which is appreciated by the customers.(Rope)

Other resources, such as the company premises or motor vehicles have an impact on the corporate image. The stylishness, location and functionality of the office or the headquarters have an influence. A company wishing to promote an ecological image may demonstrate this by the use of recycled paper products or of ecological office furnishings. The style, condition and visibility of cars and other materials are a contributing factor in the formation of a company image.(Rope)

The perceived **innovativeness** of the company is an important factor in image formation. An innovative company is more efficient in producing new products and processes than its competitors. In

addition, the company is perceived to have a higher risk toleration. (Garbett)

3.10. Uncontrollable Factors

It is impossible for a company to control all the components of its corporate image. An important uncontrollable factor is the **country of origin**. The variations between country images are quite large: some countries have the reputation of ecology or good quality, while others have the reputation of producing low-quality goods and the exploitation of workers. This reputation, whether founded or unfounded can be a deciding factor for a consumer when choosing a product or a service. (Korhonen) Min Han argues that when the consumers have no previous experience of a country's products, the country image influences the image of goods and services. On the other hand, as consumers become familiar with a country's products, country image may summarize their beliefs about the product attributes. (Min Han)

Garbett (1988) points out that target audiences change constantly with **time**, and that memory decay takes place quite rapidly. Time also has an influence on the process of image building, and only with time can the final effect of an image building campaign be tested.

4. SERVICES

4.1. Introduction

Service is the production of an essentially intangible benefit, either in its own right or as a significant element of a tangible product, which, through some form of exchange, satisfies an identified consumer need. (Palmer,3) A service component can be a minor or a major part of the total offer. Four categories of offer can be distinguished:

1. **A pure tangible good** does not include any services accompanying the product.
2. **A tangible good** with accompanying services. Here the offer consists of a tangible good accompanied by one or more services to enhance its consumer appeal.
3. **A major service** with accompanying minor goods and services. Here, the offer consists of a major service along with some additional services and/or supporting goods. An example is magazines offered to airline passengers.
4. **A pure service**, such as massage or psychotherapy consists primarily of a service. (Kotler, 1988)

A service in itself does not produce a tangible output, although it may be instrumental in producing one. A service is a transaction in which over 50% of the total value acquired is intangible in nature. Tangible elements are always involved in the production of services, either as support goods, such as computer terminals, used by the supplier, or as facilitating goods used by the recipient. (Johnson et al.)

4.2. Service Characteristics

The most important characteristics of a service are its intangibility, inseparability, perishability and variability. The transfer of a service does not generally result in ownership. The differences between a service and a physical product have implications both in the marketing and the evaluation of services. Services are series of activities rather than things and the customer participates in the production process, at least to some extent. (Grönroos,29)

4.2.1. Intangibility

Services are intangible. A pure service is ephemeral and experiential in nature - it cannot be assessed using any of the physical senses. (Lovelock) However, many services include highly tangible elements as well. A service is normally perceived in a subjective manner. When services are described by customers, expressions such as experiences, trust, feeling and security are used.

Unlike physical products, services cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before they are bought. Often, services are less standardized than goods. This makes it difficult for a customer to evaluate a service (Palmer). Because of this, the customer perceives a high level of risk when acquiring a service. For the service provider, on the other hand, it may difficult to differentiate the offering from that of a competitor. (Johnson et al.)

To reduce uncertainty, the buyers will look for signs or evidence of the service quality. A great emphasis is placed on the customer's personal information sources and on their recommendation. Tangible clues are what allow the consumer to judge a service. (Lovelock) The price of a service is often used as a basis for assessing quality. A higher price is

seen to indicate higher quality. (Palmer) In addition, inferences about the quality of the service are drawn from the place, people, equipment, communication material, and symbols that the consumers see. (Kotler 1988)

Because of the uncertainty experienced by the potential buyer due to the nature of the product, it is the service provider's task is to tangibilize the intangible. Whereas product marketers are challenged to add abstract ideas, service marketers are challenged to put physical evidence on their abstract offers. This can be done using a number of tools such as distribution, personnel, material equipment, communication material, symbols or price. (Kotler 1988)

4.2.2. Inseparability

Service is a series of activities or processes which are typically sold first, then simultaneously produced and consumed. This is not true of physical goods that are manufactured, put into inventory, sold later, and consumed still later. While the method of goods production is usually of little importance to the customer, production processes are critical to the consumer of services. (Palmer)

As there is no preproduced quality to control in advance, before the service is sold and consumed, it is very difficult to manage quality control. This implies that the quality control and marketing must take place at the time and place of simultaneous service production and consumption (Grönroos). The greater the weight of intangible elements in a market entity, the greater will be the divergence from product marketing in priorities and approach. (G. Lynn Shostack in Lovelock)

The **role** of a customer varies between different types of service. In some cases, the physical presence of a client is required in the service

transaction. This includes services, such as beauty salons and hotels, where the client visits the service provider. In other types of service, the client's physical presence is required, but it is the service provider that visits to the customer. In the case of car repairs, the customer's physical presence is only required at the beginning and at the end of the service transaction. Finally, some service transactions take place at a distance and the client's presence is not required. (Lovelock). If the customer's presence is required, the geographical area which firm can cover is limited in size. (Johnson et al.).

If the service is rendered by a person, that person is part of the service. When the client is also present as the service is being produced, provider-client interaction is a special feature of service marketing. The customer not only is the receiver, but is an additional participant in the service production, influencing the outcome of the service. (Grönroos) Other consumers simultaneously consuming a mass-produced service can influence its image in two ways:

1. The characteristics of other users can affect the image of the service, e.g. by giving it a sense of exclusiveness
2. Since the other customers participate in the service interaction as well, their behavior or the service granted to them can influence the final quality received. An example is a complicated task, which takes a long time to complete by the service provider, thereby prolonging the service for the other customers. (Palmer)

In the case of **entertainment and professional services**, buyers are highly interested in who the provider is. When clients have strong provider preferences, price is used to ration the limited supply of the preferred provider's time. (Kotler 1988) Thus, the tickets to see a famous singer or an important ice hockey game tend to cost more than the ones to less-popular events.

For most services, there is a lack of physical distribution channels, because of the inseparable character of the service. This presents a challenge in scheduling delivery for most types of service. Some services, such as hotels, have Electronic Distribution Channels designed to provide information and advice, and to enable the on-line, long-distance booking of hotel rooms.

4.2.3. Variability

Services are highly variable, as they depend on who provides them, and on when and where they are provided. Because of the impact of people; service personnel, customers or both; on the production and delivery process, a heterogeneity aspect follows from the basic characteristics. This implies that a service to one customer is not necessarily equal to that to another. The changing quality and consistency of services creates one of the major problems in service management: maintaining an evenly perceived quality of the services produced and rendered to customers. (G. Lynn Shostack in Lovelock) Service buyers are aware of this high variability, and frequently talk to others before selecting a service provider. (Kotler 1988)

The quality of a service can vary from one service organization to another, even in the same chain; between service performers, due to differences in their experience and training; as well as varying for the same provider from one occasion to another, depending on factors like mood and motivation. The buyer participation introduces an element of great uncertainty into the service equation. (Johnson et al.,17)

It can be difficult to carry out monitoring and control to ensure consistent standards. There being few clearly defined and tangible clues for services, the gap between estimated and actual consumer

quality expectations may be considerably larger in service companies than in firms that produce tangible goods. (Zeithaml et al.) This variability of service output can cause problems for brand-building in services in comparison with tangible goods. The service sector's attempt to reduce variability concentrate on methods used to select, train, motivate and control personnel and to monitoring customer satisfaction. (Kotler 1988, Palmer)

Service firms can take two steps toward quality control. The first is investing in a recruitment and training process. Airlines, banks, and hotels spend substantial sums to train their employees to provide better service. Variability can be reduced by training the service providers in appropriate responses to each customer situation. (Kotler 1988)

The second step is monitoring customer satisfaction through suggestion and complaint systems, customer surveys, and comparison shopping in order for poor service to be detected and corrected. (Palmer)

4.2.4 Perishability

Services cannot be stored. A service goes out of existence at the time it is rendered, although its effects may last for some time. The service has to be produced on demand and it cannot be owned, redistributed or resold. Excess capacity is lost forever and too little capacity means lost business. (Johnson et al.,15)

The perishability of services is not a problem when demand is steady, because it is easy to staff the services in advance. (Kotler 1988) When demand fluctuates, great attention has to be paid to its management by evening out peaks and troughs and in scheduling

service production to follow this pattern as far as possible. (Palmer) For example, public transportation companies have to own much more equipment because of rush-hour demand than they would if demand were even throughout the day.

4.2.5. Lack of Ownership

Generally, no ownership is transferred from the seller to the buyer. The buyer is merely buying the right to a service process, such as the use of a car park or a solicitor's time. A distinction should be made between the inability to own the service act, and the rights that a buyer may acquire to have a service carried out at some time in the future. This inability has implications for the design of distribution channels - a wholesaler or retailer cannot take title. Instead, direct distribution methods are more common and when intermediaries are used, they generally act as a co-producer of the service. (Palmer,7) The service can be delivered on a continuous basis or as a series of discrete transactions. In addition, it can be supplied casually or within an ongoing relationship.

As discussed earlier, it is frequently difficult for a customer to evaluate the quality of a service. In goods marketing, the perceived product quality is fairly independent of how it is obtained, whereas in services marketing the perceived service quality is enmeshed with the service deliverer. (Palmer)

4.3. Technical vs. Functional Quality

In services, the quality of what the customers receive, or the **technical quality**, is not the sole determinant of the total quality of the offer. Technical quality can often be measured rather objectively, since it is the outcome of the service transaction.

Functional quality is the way the customer has received the service. This concept includes the appearance and behavior of the service personnel, the accessibility of the location, and the behavior of the other customers present. (Grönroos)

The perceived quality of the service is influenced not only by the technical and functional quality, but by the difference between expected and actual service. The expectations are formed by word-of-mouth communication, company image and marketing communications. (Grönroos).

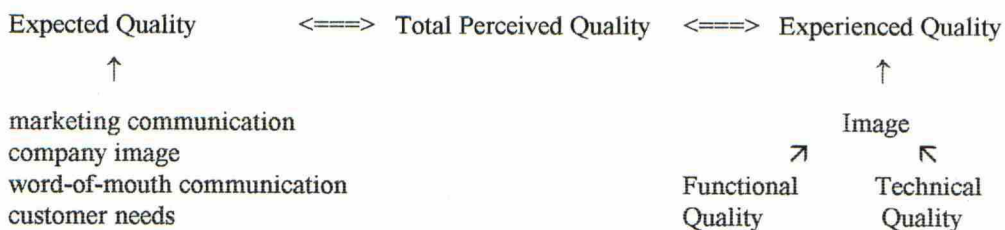


Figure 5. Service Quality (Grönroos, 41)

While it is fairly simple to judge the technical quality of some services, there are some services whose technical quality cannot be judged by a customer even after consumption. The more intangible elements the product contains, the more difficult it is for a consumer to judge its quality. While a great number of goods may be evaluated after purchase, most of the services can only be evaluated after consumption. Moreover, some of the services are so specialized in character that the client may find it difficult to make a judgment of their quality even after consumption. In the latter case, any word-of-mouth communication plays an important role at the moment of purchase-decision by the customer. (Kotler, 1988)

4.4. International Marketing of Services.

There are three patterns of trade in the international marketing of services. The first pattern is the production of a service in one country for consumption in another. Often, information services or insurance belong to this group. The main reasons for this type of trade are differences in price and capacity. (Palmer,303)

The production of a service by a domestic company in an overseas market for overseas consumption takes place when the problem of inseparability cannot be overcome. An example of this is the international franchising of restaurants. (Palmer)

A third group consists of the production of a service at home for sale to overseas customers for consumption in the domestic market. The most significant example of this is the travel industry, where unique geographical features are an element of the service. Other reasons for this type of international trade can be that the service is of a highly specialized nature, or that there are legal reasons preventing its use in the foreign market (e.g. abortion laws). In some cases, the production costs may be a significant factor.(Palmer)

As with any product, the international marketing of services presents challenges. Hotels are taking into account their overseas customers by hiring and training multilingual staff and by using cultural symbols both in their marketing activities and in the hotel itself. One hotel chain provides Japanese food and beverages for their Japanese clients. By doing this, the hotel aims at making the customers feel comfortable with the hotel service environment, thereby creating additional guest satisfaction and new business. (Teare,65)

In the international marketing of tourism, the transaction usually takes place through a number of intermediaries. Due to this, a particular attention is paid by the hotels to the marketing to the intermediate purchaser, as well as directly targeting the potential client. This is done in order to have the travel agent recommend the hotel to a potential customer. (Witt et al., Lovelock)

4.5. Hotels

The service package of a hotel consists of both tangible and intangible elements. Product elements include the physical facilities: the guest rooms, the restaurants and bars, as well as the food and beverages served in them. Service elements include all the different services offered; housekeeping; room service; and reception.

Core service is the reason for which the company is on the market.(Grönroos) In the case of a hotel, this consists of providing lodging for paying guests. The core components of a hotel's service offering include the guest room, and restaurant and bar provisions (Teare).

Facilitating services and goods are mandatory and without them, the service package would collapse. In hotels, reservation system and reception are required to facilitate the use of the core service. (Grönroos)

Supporting services and goods are used to differentiate the service offering from that of the competitors or to increase the value-added. Supporting services span laundry and dry cleaning; entertainment, health care; business services; and telecommunications. (Teare)

Location is critical for accommodation units and, once established, cannot be changed. This can be a particular problem in periods of changing tastes, there being a time lag between the planning of a hotel and of its coming into operation. Location is important with regard to both the destination and to the unit's position within the destination itself. (Witt et al.)

4.6. Hotel Chains

In recent years, concentration has been increasing in the hotel industry. A typical strategy has been the mutual horizontal integration of independent hotels, and their grouping into national and international hotel chains. The reason for this trend lies in the potential economies of scale in marketing, finance, training, and purchasing achieved by the concentration of activities. (Witt et al.)

The grouping of hotels is not necessarily an indication of ownership. While there are hotel chains where the chain owns most of the hotels, there are also consortia of independent hotels formed for marketing or reservation purposes. In order to distinguish between the two types of chains in this study, the more strictly controlled one is defined as a hotel chain. The chain of independent hotels will be called a marketing chain.

In order for a hotel chain to be successful, it is often necessary to present a uniform identity, and to achieve a consistent chain image. For this, not only standardized logos or brochures are used, but a tight quality control is needed to ensure homogeneity in all the activities of the chain. (Palonperä) This implies that the perceived quality of all the service outlets should be the same, regardless of the place of operation. Often, a marketing chain may not be capable of a strict

control of its member hotels, and its image may therefore be more varied.

It has been stated that, today, having a strong brand with a good image is imperative in the hotel industry. Because of this, an independent hotel can survive on its own only with an exceptionally high quality or a distinctive character. Chain operations facilitate the marketing of brands. In addition, it is possible for a large entity to raise cost effectiveness by rationalizing its activities. (Palonperä)

5. FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapters, different aspects of image and of service companies were discussed. On the basis of this discussion, the following framework can be constructed.

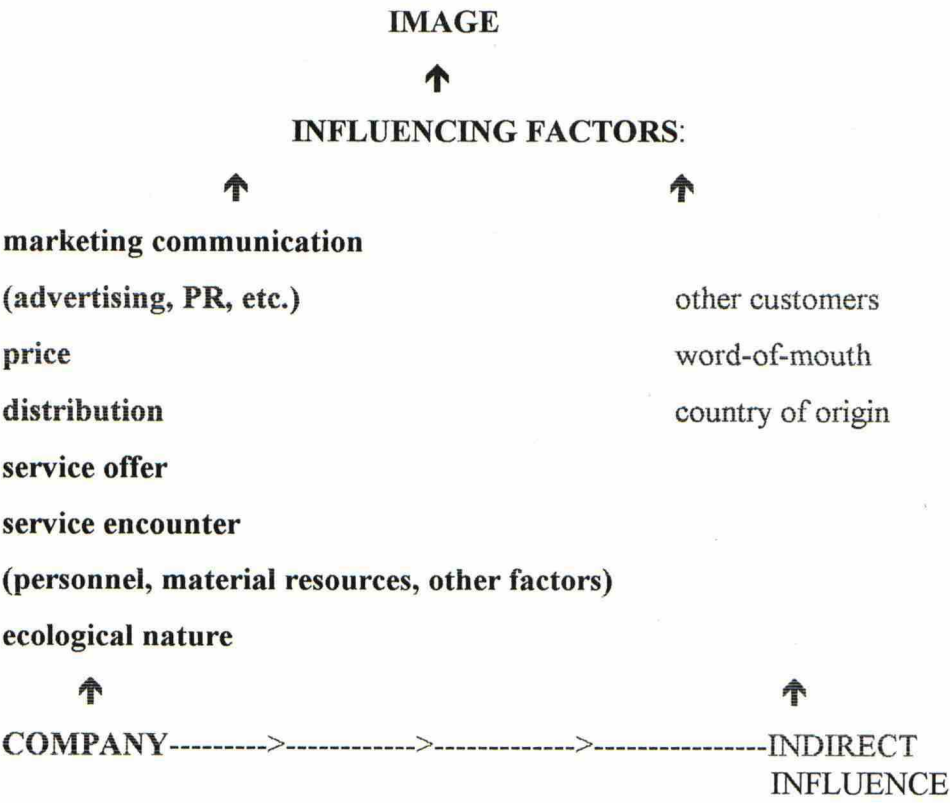


Figure 6. The Framework of the Study

While there are several factors that generally contribute to the image of a company, some of them have been considered of a lesser importance to this study.

First of all, the study aims at examining the company image creation among the potential customers of hotels. For this reason, financial performance is not considered that important an influence when a tourist, or even a businessperson, makes the choice of an accommodation. The same can be said about institutional advertising.

While it may interest some clients to know the position of a certain hotel or hotel chain with regard to an issue, this is not often a basis for a choice of lodging. In international marketing, it may be quite difficult to demonstrate social responsibility and, for this reason, this aspect is not included in the study.

Due to the inseparable character of a hotel service offer, it is almost impossible to distinguish the image of the product - the service - from that of the company. The main elements of the image formation of a hotel or a hotel chain are:

1. Marketing communication
2. Other elements of the marketing mix, such as price and marketing communication.
3. The actual service encounter
4. Indirect factors, such as the information received from previous consumers of the service, or country image.

Only the direct ways of influencing the company image are of interest to this study. **Marketing communication**, by the means of advertising or PR, is perhaps the most widely used means of creating a company image. These measures can be taken to change an image, as well. However, the changing or improving a company image is often a longer process, where several other factors need to be taken into account. This study concentrates on the initial image building activities.

The **service offer** itself, including its **price and distribution**, tend to influence the company image. The service itself is the most important element of all, but its use is limited in creating a company image prior to service consumption. Marketing communication can be used to create expectations of service quality. In addition to the elements of the service package, special characteristics of the offering may be

communicated to potential customers. Since **ecology** is a growing trend in several countries, some hotels have chosen that as a basis for differentiating their offer from the competitors. Marketing communication is widely recognized as being paid for by the company. Therefore, the word-of-mouth communication with friends and relatives is important for the initial image formation of a potential customer. The price or the distribution methods, for example the choice of a travel agent, may have more influence on initial image creation than the offered service itself.

A crucial element of image formation is the actual **service encounter**. As discussed earlier, a client assesses the service based both on the technical and the functional quality delivered. The service encounter is the stage where initial image can change radically. Elements that come into play at the service encounter are the personnel of the company, and their behavior. In addition, the material elements, such as the existence of restaurants and other additional services, the decoration of rooms, or the availability of reservation systems influence the client's perception of the service. Other customers present may have a profound effect on service delivery, but since the behavior of customers is hardly controllable by the company, this study does not concern that aspect.

6. RESEARCH METHODS

6.1. The Aim of the Study

The study aims at finding out the different ways in which service firms build and maintain company image among the existing and potential international customers. In order to achieve this, hotels and hotel chains have been interviewed. Individual hotels and hotel chains are first examined in two separate groups, and the groups are then compared to find out whether common factors in image creation do exist.

In order to answer the main question, different issues need to be examined. For this study, these are as follows:

1. The image that the hotel or hotel chain strives to achieve.
2. The segmentation of the clientele, especially internationally.
3. The factors that influence the image of a hotel chain or that of an individual hotel.
4. The different methods used in creating, maintaining or improving the company image.
5. Any future developments.

The desired image and the customer segments are examined in order to find out eventual differences between the hotels. Some methods of image building may only be applicable for certain types of hotels and/or customer segments. Therefore, it is important to know and, if necessary, eliminate any differences caused by this. The study aims at discovering general trends, not specific characteristics of hotels striving to achieve e.g. an ecological image. The factors that the companies consider important to image creation are studied in order to gain insight into the reasons for which certain methods are used by the

hotel firms in creating a company image. Possible future developments include any new developments that may take place in the hotel industry and in the image creation methods.

6.2. Qualitative vs. Quantitative Study

It is difficult to quantify an image, that is, to present it in a numeric way. For this reason, this study has mostly been conducted in a qualitative manner. However, for reasons of practicality, some questions related to the customer segment, and factors influencing the company image have been presented in a numeric way. This has been done solely to simplify the answering process to certain questions for the respondents. The number of the companies studied being relatively low, an in-depth statistical analysis was deemed unnecessary.

6.3. Reliability

The concept of reliability measures the degree to which a study and its results can be repeated. The less random the results, the more reliable a study. Factors lowering reliability include misconceptions, misunderstandings and mistakes by the interviewer or the interviewee (Uusitalo, 84). In this study, managerial-level employees of selected hotel chains and individual hotels were questioned. At the time of the interview, the questions were presented in a clear and concise manner, the respondents had an access to the questionnaire, and the interviewer had the possibility of double-checking the responses at a later date. The hotels were studied by questionnaires. The questions were precise, and no misleading or difficult concepts were used. The respondents all held managerial-level positions.

6.4. Validity

Validity measures the extent to which a test or a study meets its intended purpose. The study is valid when the interviewees have given an answer in a truthful manner. In qualitative research, for a study to be valid, the theoretical and empirical concepts need to be connected. This study aims at finding out the factors influencing the company image and the methods used by hotels to influence that image. To this end, a questionnaire consisting of questions on these issues was formulated. The empirical part of the study is based on a theoretical framework.

The study is both reliable and valid.

6.5. Research Subjects

The study concentrates on examining the international image formation of service companies. In order to find appropriate research subjects, a careful consideration was made. A great number of Finnish service firms do not actively pursue overseas customers. An important exception being the tourism industry, especially hotels and hotel chains, they were regarded to be the most appropriate research subjects.

Since the chain organizations often have an important role in the marketing of hotel services, it was decided to contact the hotel chains in order to examine some of the main issues in their image creation effort. Simultaneously, it was considered of an equal importance to research individual, independent hotels.

Most of the Finnish hotel chains were contacted. Only those, such as Lomaliitto, whose offer was deemed to consist mostly of camping

facilities, holiday cottages or youth hostels, were not included in the study. The Finnish Hotel-, Restaurant and Cafeteria Association (HRY) was contacted to obtain information on independent hotels.

In the hotel chains, a marketing manager or a marketing director was contacted. Only a person at a fairly elevated rank in the organization was regarded as being competent to answer the questions of this study. In the individual hotels, a hotel manager or a marketing manager was contacted. An initial contact was established to all the companies, in order to find a suitable person to be interviewed.

Initially, it was intended to conduct the entire study through interviews. Due to the difficulties in reaching certain respondents in the individual hotels, it was decided to divide the research subjects into two groups. All of the hotel chains were to be interviewed, while the individual hotels were to be contacted by mail.

Interviewing was chosen due to the nature of the questions to be studied. It was assumed that the respondents might have difficulties in trying to quantify certain points in the questionnaire. It was felt that a personal contact would enable a more thorough an insight into each hotel chain. In some chains, the hotels are quite uniform in nature, while there are distinct differences between the hotels in other chains. For this reason, it was necessary to have some additional explanations from the respondents. It was expected that these could be more easily discussed during an interview.

6.6. Approaching the Companies

A short letter describing the purpose of the study was addressed to each respondent in the hotel chains. In the following days, a phone

call was made to each person in order to fix a date for the interview. One hotel chain did not wish to take part in the study.

The individual hotels received an explanatory letter personally addressed to a manager, and a questionnaire along with a return-envelope. The number of individual hotels studied remained quite low, mainly due to the desire to limit the scope of the study to the Helsinki area, and due to the comparative nature of the study.

6.7. Hotel Chains

The personal interviews of hotel chains took place in the company premises. A questionnaire was handed out to each respondent at the time of the interview, in order to facilitate the actual interviewing process. In addition to the prepared questions, a number of more precise questions were posed in order to clarify certain points. At the beginning of each interview, a short overview of the study was presented to the interviewees. The respondents had a possibility to explain some points in detail, and an additional opportunity to ask questions. The average duration of an interview was 30-45 minutes. For reasons of simplicity, the interviews were conducted entirely in Finnish.

6.7.1. Questionnaire

The first part of the questionnaire contains information about the hotel chain, and about the number of the hotels in it, as well as about the ownership structure of those hotels. In addition, the name and the job title of each respondent are requested.

The second part begins with information on the possible partners of the hotel chain. This question arises from the fact that a customer very

rarely contacts the hotel itself when making a first reservation, and the importance of a travel agent may be great. By asking this question, it is intended to find out the amount of international cooperation of hotel chains, and whether there are differences between the cooperation activities of a hotel chain and those of the hotels in that chain. The degree of independence of chain hotels is of an additional interest to the study.

In the following question, the hotel chains are requested to give an approximation of the importance of different customer groups to the chain as a whole. The objective of this question is to find out whether there are clear differences between the chains studied. These image variations might then be able to provide an explanation for the eventual differences in the image building methods used by the hotel chains. Furthermore, this question gives insight into the importance of international clients to the hotel chains in Finland.

In the third question of the second section, the hotel chains are asked to specify the most frequent countries of origin of their visitors. The answers may indicate the existence of general trends with regard to the countries. In addition, the possible future development, as to the countries, is discussed.

The third section examines the factors influencing the image formation of the Finnish hotel chains. In the first question, the hotel chains are asked about the image that they aim at achieving in Finland. In addition, the international image of the hotel chains is discussed, in order to discover any differences between the two images. The desired image of the hotel chain is relevant to the study because of its possible influence on the methods used in image creation.

In the following question, the respondents are asked whether the chosen company image has been an conscious choice, and what the choice is based on. The aim of this question is in discovering whether the hotel chains have an image building program.

This section is concluded by a question on the factors that the hotel chains consider important to the formation of the company image of a hotel chain, or of an individual hotel. This question aims at discovering some of the factors influencing the company image, and to then compare them to the means used to improve the image of hotel chains.

In the final part of the questionnaire, the means used by hotel chains in creating or improving their image, both in Finland and internationally, are discussed. The methods in domestic and international markets are then compared in order to find out and explain any differences between them. After answering these questions, the respondent then had the possibility to explain the structure and activities of the studied hotel chain further.

6.8. Hotels

Since they were not to be interviewed, a more structured questionnaire was sent to the selected hotels. The number of hotels studied was quite limited due to the fact that it was quite difficult to find independent hotels in the Helsinki area.

The questionnaire sent to the independent hotels was based on the one used in interviewing the hotel chains. There were, however, some differences.

The first section of the questionnaire is designed with the aim of finding out the size of the hotel, its ownership structure, and whether the hotel belongs to a domestic or to an international marketing chain. In this part, the name and the job title of the respondent are also requested.

The next section aims at discovering the importance of certain activities, such as of a restaurant, to the hotel studied. This question, along with the one on the most important customer groups, examines differences between the studied hotels.

The question of the domestic and international target image of the hotel, and of the eventual differences between them, is similar to the one posed to the hotel chains.

The question of factors affecting the international image of the hotels is more structured than the one answered by the hotel chains. This is mainly due to the fact that since the representatives of hotels were not interviewed, it was felt that this question, if presented in a more open way, would have required some additional explanations.

Consequently, a numerical presentation was judged to make the question more easily understood.

As with the previous question, the question concerning the methods of image formation is presented in a numeric table format. It was assumed that this presentation mode would ensure a more uniform answer from the hotels. In the final question, the hotels are asked to specify whether any differences exist between the Finnish and the overseas markets, as well as the eventual reasons for this.

7. EMPIRICAL DATA

7.1. Introduction

Due to the fairly limited number of studied companies, it was judged most sensible to first give a brief description of each company, and then make a generalization of the results. The case-method has not been used, due to the fact that there are several distinctive similarities between the companies. Some company-specific data has been eliminated, in order to ensure the anonymity of each company. Hotel chains and hotels will be described in two separate sections. After this, a comparative analysis of them will be made.

7.2. Hotel Chains

7.2.1. Introduction

Initially, a brief description of each hotel chain will be given. Thereafter, the chains will be discussed as a group.

Chain 1 is a highly international marketing chain, with 7 privately-owned hotels in Finland. The chain organization provides reservation services and, if requested, additional marketing services for the hotels. The marketing activities of this chain are not very centralized. The main client segments of Chain 1 are foreign and domestic business travelers. Also important are Finnish and foreign vacationers.

Chain 2 consists of both private hotels and those owned by the chain itself. There are a total of 40 hotels in Finland, and several abroad. All of these hotels are grouped under the hotel chain. Domestic clients represent the largest segment for Chain 2. Among the foreign visitors, the tourists are the most important client group for this hotel chain.

Chain 3 is a domestic hotel chain, consisting of 19 hotels. The chain has the ownership of all its hotels. Chain 3 is a very centralized marketing organization. The most important customer groups are businessmen and vacationers. A central location is important to this chain.

Chain 4 is a centralized hotel chain, not unlike Chain 3. There are a total of 10 hotels, mainly destined for vacationers and conference participants.

Chain 5 is the marketing chain of 40 privately-owned hotels. Domestic clients are by far the most important ones for this organization, especially the businessmen. Due to the entrepreneurial character of its hotels, this chain aims at projecting the image of small, cozy, Central European hotels.

7.2.2. Cooperation Activities

Membership in an international marketing chain, and all of the independent marketing activities are generally the most important to the Finnish hotel chains. All of the studied chains cooperate with at least one international marketing chain. Cooperation with the Finnish Tourist Board (MEK) and with foreign travel agents is also important. The Finnish Tourist Board is used mainly to arouse an initial interest in Finland. Intermediaries are a very important factor in selling the hotels' services to the end-users. For some hotel chains, the cooperation with domestic or international transportation companies is very important. For others, however, it is only of a limited importance.

1. International marketing chain
Own marketing
2. Cooperation with the Finnish Tourist Board
Cooperation with foreign travel agents
3. Package holidays
4. Cooperation with Finnish and foreign transport companies
5. Regional / city brochures

Table 1. The Importance of Different Cooperation Methods to the Chains' Activities

The independence of the chain hotels, with regard to the cooperation varies greatly. Some of the hotel chains were clearly umbrella organizations, which provide their hotels with marketing support solely upon request. The hotels in these chains often had private contacts with several of the above-mentioned organizations. Other chains had a very centralized structure. In the more centralized hotel chains, any direct relationships between the hotels and possible partners were very sporadic in nature.

7.2.3. Image

The hotel chains were asked about the reason for choosing the particular image that they wish to achieve. For three of the hotel chains, the image has been a conscious choice. For this, the clients and the markets have been carefully researched, and the hotels have been acquired / constructed with the chosen image in mind. The rest of the chains considered their image to be more of a coincidence. For them, the image has become automatically due to the nature of the hotels or as a result of cooperation with an international chain.

7.2.4. Hotel Chain Image

When asked about the factors that influence the image of the hotel chain, most of the answers received were quite uniform in nature. All of the respondents mentioned that all of the chain hotels are very important to the image formation of the chain. According to the chains, the overall quality of the hotels, their cleanliness and the friendliness of the personnel, are significant for the image creation process. In addition, all the external communication of the hotel chains, such as the presence in exhibitions, the use of uniform logos and brochures, is considered relevant. Finally, each hotel chain mentioned at least one special characteristic of that particular chain. These characteristics enable the chains to differentiate themselves from the competition, be the basis for differentiation the international character, the price-level or the coziness of the hotels.

Since the chain hotels were considered a determinant element in the formation of the overall company image, the hotel chains were then asked to mention some of the factors which they consider important to the image of individual hotels.

7.2.5. Hotel Image

According to the respondents, by far the most important influence to the hotel image results from the behavior and competence of the hotel staff. A respondent stated that "the products of the different chains are very similar, and the importance of the personnel is therefore emphasized". In addition, the physical facilities - the rooms, restaurants, bars, and other services - were considered important. One of the chains mentioned a central location as an important determinant of a hotel image. The price-level was seen by some as important for the image. Marketing communication was not mentioned, save for one

chain, which emphasized its lack of importance for the hotels in their chain. Moreover, one chain mentioned the importance of a chain logo for the individual hotel, while another emphasized the importance of uniform advertising with the other chain hotels.

7.2.6. Means Used to Improve Image

The chains are slightly different in their market segmentation and in their organization. Some of the chains only market directly to the decision-makers, without advertising in mass medias, while others mainly use these means of communication to the general public. Despite of these differences, the methods used in domestic and international image building are fairly similar.

In Finland, trade shows and written communication are the most widely used methods of image creation. Written communication includes brochures, advertising, posters and press articles. In marketing communication, it is generally considered important to present a uniform picture of the hotel chain, using standardized logos or letterheads. The existence of a strong brand, and a tight quality control were seen to be very significant. Sponsorship is used by some hotel chains, but only in a very limited way.

For most of the hotel chains, the means of building / improving an international company image do not differ from the domestic ones to a great extent. Some chains rely on the image of their international marketing chain when building a chain image abroad. For other chains, the choice of intermediaries, and their image, is considered the most important factor for the image formation. Brochures are often available in a multitude of languages, and all of the chains participate in international exhibitions. Some of the chains are very specialized, and only sell their products to a certain geographical segment.

Interestingly, the Finnish Tourist Board was only mentioned by one of the respondents. He said that this organization is inefficient, and that this is the reason for not cooperating with it. However, the same respondent had earlier stated that the cooperation activities with the Finnish Tourist Board have are fairly important to his hotel chain. The hotel chains were asked to specify the reasons for the differences between the domestic and the international image creation efforts. For one chain, the determinant factor for the relatively small international marketing effort was budgetary restrictions. For another, the image creation in international markets is a longer process than in Finland, and it requires more effort and time. The process includes the country image. The country image of Finland was considered slightly problematic by several of the respondents. The country is seen to be remote, cold and expensive by several international clients.

7.2.7. Summary of Hotel Chains

For the hotel chains, the most important factors determining the company image, are the hotels belonging to the chain, as well as the different means of external communication. The respondents considered the main factors influencing the hotel image to be the personnel and a globally uniform marketing communication.

The methods used in image communication vary slightly between the hotel chains. While there are distinctive differences between the chains, most of them consider marketing communication to have a great importance. The ways in which marketing communication is used varies. Some hotel chains are very selective, and only use certain types of communication (direct mail, trade shows), while others, targeting the general public, use the mass media in addition to exhibitions. Brochures are considered of an utmost importance by all the chains. One of the chains even has a company magazine. In

international markets, the choice of methods is even more limited. None of the studied hotels invest strongly on international image creation. Some rely on the image of an international marketing chain or intermediaries, while others do nothing or do very little for their international company image.

7.3. Hotels

7.3.1. Introduction

The questionnaire was sent to 6 privately-owned hotels in the Helsinki area. In total, 5 responses were received, which is equal to a response rate of 83,3%.

Even though some of the questions were presented in a numeric way, the sample of the hotels is of a very limited size. Due to this, each hotel and its activities will first be described separately.

Hotel 1 is a medium-sized privately-owned hotel, which is not located in the city center. It does not belong to a domestic or to an international marketing chain. Most of the clients are domestic, and they are mainly business or conference travelers. The importance of international customers is quite small. For Hotel 1, conference services are a very important and restaurants a fairly important part of the service package. This hotel aims at creating an image of quality and trust. The desired international company image does not differ from the domestic one.

Hotel 2 is a small-to-medium-sized private hotel. It belongs to an international marketing chain. Hotel services form by far the most important part of its activities, but, in addition, there is a limited offer of conference and restaurant services. Foreign travelers are slightly more

important to this hotels than the domestic ones. The main domestic group consists of business travelers, while most of the foreign visitors are either businessmen or conference participants. Hotel 2 aims at creating an image of a centrally-located cozy hotel. There are no differences between the domestic and the international company images.

Hotel 3 is a medium-sized hotel. The ownership is private and the hotel belongs to a marketing chain in Finland. In addition to the hotel services, restaurant and conference services play an equally important role to this establishment. Foreign client groups are slightly more important to this hotel than the domestic ones. In particular, the foreign business travelers and domestic and foreign conference participants are important client groups. Hotel 3 aims at creating the image of a private high quality hotel with a competent staff. There is no difference between the Finnish and the international image.

Hotel 4 is a small-to-medium-sized independent hotel. It does belong to a domestic marketing chain. Hotel service is by far the most important service provided by this establishment with the restaurant services playing a very small role. The most important customer group consists mainly of vacationers, both Finnish and international. Hotel 4 pictures itself as an inexpensive centrally-located hotel. There is no difference between the domestic and the international image.

Hotel 5 is a medium-sized privately-owned hotel, and it belongs to marketing chains both in Finland and internationally. Restaurant and conference services do not play an important part in the activities of Hotel 5. About 75% of all the clients are foreign visitors. Of them, business travelers and vacationers are the most important client groups, followed by international and domestic conference visitors. Hotel 5 aims at creating the image of a cozy, peaceful, well-kept hotel in the city center. There are slight differences to the domestic image.

The number of hotels studied is quite limited. For the analysis of the questions presented numerically, it was judged best to calculate an arithmetic average of the results. Since the number of hotels studied is quite limited, the results obtained will not allow too large a generalization.

One of the hotels, Hotel 1, concentrates its activities on catering to domestic customers. Since this hotel represents 20% of the sample, and since its results may be fairly different from those of the other hotels due to its different market-orientation policy, it was considered most reasonable to separate the results of Hotel 1 from the more internationally-oriented hotels. However, the answers obtained from Hotel 1 were not totally eliminated, since the hotel has some international marketing activities despite of its mainly domestic orientation. Hotel 2 and Hotel 5 consider international clients to be more important than the domestic ones. It might have been interesting to examine their result separately, but, due to the limited number of responses, that would have made the final result too much of a generalization. Hotels 2 to 5 will hereafter be called domestic-internationally-oriented hotels.

7.3.2. Cooperation Activities

All of the studied hotels considered their own marketing efforts to be the most important for their activities. The domestic-internationally-oriented hotels felt that the cooperation with foreign travel agents was very significant to their activities. Quite important was also the membership in an international marketing chain. For those hotels that belonged in one, the membership was rated as of an equal importance to that of cooperation with foreign travel agents. The regional cooperation with other hotels and service providers from the same geographical area; the cooperation with domestic transportation

companies, such as Finnair; and package tours from abroad were rated as quite important in nature. A domestic marketing chain, cooperation with the Finnish Tourist Board, and cooperation with foreign transportation companies were rated as being of a below-average importance by the domestic-internationally-oriented hotels.

The result for this question is not considerably altered when taking into account the answers obtained from the domestically-oriented Hotel 1.

Domestic-international	All
1. Own marketing	1. Own marketing
2. Cooperation with foreign travel agents	2. Cooperation with foreign travel agents
3. International marketing chain	3. Cooperation with domestic transportation co.'s
Regional cooperation	4. Package tours from abroad
Cooperation with domestic transportation co's	5. Domestic marketing chain
4. Package tours from abroad	International marketing chain
5. Domestic marketing chain	6. Regional cooperation
Cooperation with foreign transportation co's	7. Finnish Tourist Board
Finnish Tourist Board	Cooperation with foreign transportation co's

Table 2. The Cooperation Activities of Individual Hotels.

7.3.3. Hotel Image

For the more internationally-oriented hotels in this study, the location of the hotel is by far the most important factor in creating a company image. All of these four hotels are centrally located, and location plays an important role in the stated company image of these hotels. Since it cannot be easily changed, location as such is not of a great interest to this study.

Domestic-international	<i>Average</i>	All	<i>Average</i>
1. Location	(5)	1. Friendliness of personnel	(4,8)
2. Friendliness	(4,75)	Location	
3. Advertising	(4,67)	2. Competence of personnel	(4,6)
4. Competence	(4,5)	3. Advertising	(4,25)
5. International Character	(4)	4. Finnish Character	(4)
6. Finnish Character	(3,75)	5. Room (amenities)	(3,8)
7. Room (amenities)	(3,5)	6. International Character	(3,4)
8. Quality of restaurant services	(3)	7. Quality of restaurant services	(3,2)
.....		Membership in chain	
9. Size of rooms	(2,75)	8. Size of rooms	(3)
No. of restaurants		Quality of conference rooms	
Membership in marketing chain		Image of other hotels in chain	
10. Image of other hotels in chain	(2,67)	Logo	
Logo		
11. Size of personnel	(2,5)	9. Number of restaurants	(2,8)
Quality of conference facilities		10. Size of personnel	(2,4)
12. No. of conference facilities	(2)	Number of conference facilities	
Quality and number of ancillary services		11. Quality and no. of ancillary services.(2)	

Table 3. The Factors Influencing the Image of a Hotel.
(5=Very Important, 1=Not Important)

The friendliness and competence of the **hotel staff**, as well as all the **advertising** are considered of an almost equal importance to the company image of a hotel. All the four hotels were quite unanimous with regard to these factors, with the exception of one, who gave no opinion to advertising. The concept of advertising here includes all the different methods of external communication, such as brochures, advertisements and other means of written communication.

The International and Finnish character of the hotels were stated to have an almost equal significance. For one hotel, which belongs to both a Finnish and an international marketing chain, the Finnish

character had very little importance. Other than that, there were no real differences between the hotels.

The room and its amenities, and the quality of the restaurant services were judged of an above-average importance to the image formation of an individual hotel. All of the other factors stated in the questionnaire were stated to have little or almost no importance to the company image of the studied hotels.

Without the elimination of the domestically-orientated Hotel 1, the results of all the hotels would be slightly changed. Friendliness of the staff would be of an equal importance to the location, and the Finnish character of the hotels would gain more importance. The results would not change dramatically, but due to the small number of study subjects, the rest of the results will, again, be examined separately.

7.3.4. Means Used to Improve Image

All of the studied hotels stated that the brochures for each individual hotel were the most important factor in communicating the hotel's image to the clients. Personal letters addressed to the clientele and the brochures of marketing chains were also important. The presence of the hotel in a domestic or a foreign travel agent's brochure was considered significant for image communication.

Domestic-International	Average	All	Average
1. Own brochures	(5)	1. Own brochures	(4,75)
Personal mail to clients		2. Personal mail	(4,4)
2. Foreign travel agents' brochures	(3,5)	3. Chain brochures	(3,25)
Articles in foreign travel magazines		4. Domestic travel agents' brochures	(3,2)
3.Chain brochures	(3,25)	Foreign travel agents' brochures	
Customer card		5. Customer card	(3)
4. Domestic travel agents' brochures	(3)	Articles in foreign travel magazines	
<hr/>			
5. Foreign trade shows	(2,75)	6. Regional brochures	(2,67)
6. Regional brochures	(2,67)	7. Foreign trade shows	(2,6)
7. Articles in foreign newspapers	(2,5)	8. Domestic trade shows	(2,4)
8. Domestic sponsorship	(2,25)	Domestic sponsorship	
Domestic trade shows		Articles in foreign newspapers	
Articles in foreign business journals		9. Advertising in foreign travel magazines	(2)
9. Advertising in foreign travel magazines	(2)	Articles in foreign business journals	
10. Advertising in foreign newspapers	(1,75)	10. Advertising in foreign newspapers	(1,8)
Articles in foreign magazines		Articles in foreign magazines	
11. Advertising in business journals	(1,5)	11. Advertising in business journals	(1,6)
Advertising in magazines		Advertising in magazines	

Table 4. The Means Used in the International Image building.
(5=Very Important, 1= Not Important)

Articles published in foreign travel magazines were seen as important for the formation of an international company image by most of the hotels. A special customer card was often considered important, especially for the hotels belonging to an international marketing chain. Regional brochures, i.e. those presenting a certain city or geographical region, were considered of an average importance by the hotels.

Once again, the results of Hotel 1 were then separated from the rest of the study subject in order to ensure that its different market-orientation would not affect the results. When doing this, it was discovered that there were only minor changes in the rank of the means of communicating the image. This may result from the fact that Hotel 1 does not actively pursue foreign clients other than by its presence in

travel brochures. The hotel stated that domestic sponsorship has an average importance in the communication of hotel image to foreign clients. An explanation is most likely the domestic-orientation of Hotel 1, as well as its lack of international marketing activities.

Earlier, the factors involved in the image formation were discussed. Advertising was stated to be of a great importance by most of the hotels. When discussing the means of influencing an image, advertising is seen to be of a minor importance. However, nearly all of the means discussed in this question are usually included under the concepts of advertising or public relations. Therefore, the answers are not contradictory, since the previous question did not include a detailed list of all the advertising methods.

In order to find out more about the methods used in image building, the hotels were asked to specify whether there were differences between the means of image creation between domestic and international marketing. Most of the hotels did not report any significant differences. The main factor was that image building in Finland was seen as a more continuous a process, mainly due to a higher allocated marketing budget.

7.3.5. Summary of Hotels

The hotels consider the most important factor in their image to be the location of their establishment. The reason for this may be the central location of the studied hotels, and the fact that the location is a stated part of the target company image of these hotels.

In addition, the studied hotels are well aware of the importance of the staff in any service encounter. The behavior and skills of the personnel are seen to play a major role in the image formation process.

Advertising and other marketing communication are seen to have an equally important role, but not all of the communication methods are used in international image building activities.

Since the Finnish and the international character of the hotels is seen to be of a nearly equal importance, it can be concluded that none of the hotels studied emphasize either to a great extent. An exception is Hotel 1, which does not actively pursue foreign clients

While all of the hotels belong to one or more marketing chains, the membership in a chain is considered of a barely above average importance. In addition, the image of the other hotels in the chain is considered insignificant for the image formation of privately-owned Finnish hotels. Moreover, the hotels estimate that their proper marketing is most important, closely followed by the cooperation with foreign travel agents. Marketing chains are significantly less important. This result emphasizes the use of the marketing chain solely for reservation purposes. Hotels do not consciously use the image of a marketing chain in building their company image.

The most important marketing communications methods used in the international creation of image are the hotel's own brochures, and direct mail to current customers. Publicity is fairly important, especially in the form of articles in foreign travel magazines. As a whole, brochures are by far the most important means for private hotels to build a company image abroad. The hotels do not seem to have a very clearly defined image building strategy.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

In comparing the hotel chains to the individual hotels, certain points can be raised. While there are no clear differences in the importance of different cooperation methods to the study subjects' activities, in that the company-specific marketing effort is considered by all to be the most important, some differences exist with regard to the other studied questions.

8.2. Influencing Factors

Both of the studied groups were asked about the factors influencing the image of an **individual hotel**. Both the hotels and the hotel chains agreed on the great importance of the service personnel in the formation of the company image of hotels. This reflects the importance of the service encounter for the image. Moreover, the chains emphasized the importance of physical facilities to a hotel, while the hotels themselves considered these facilities of an average or below-average importance.

In addition, the hotels consider advertising important for their image-formation process. The hotel chains do not agree. This result can be explained by the centralized marketing of most of the chains. The privately-owned hotels have a real independence with regard to their marketing, while the chain hotels are often closely monitored and controlled.

Another factor in which the opinions differ is the location of the hotel. For the independent hotels, this is the most important factor

determining the hotel image. Only one of the hotel chains mentions location as being important to hotel images. All of the private hotels are located in Helsinki, and central location is critical to their activities. This can, therefore, be considered an explanatory factor to this different result. Had the studied privately-owned hotels been located elsewhere, where location is of a lesser importance, the results might have been different.

With regard to the company image of a **hotel chain**, the most important factors mentioned were the hotels belonging to the chain; their quality; and personnel. All the external communication activities, especially advertising, were considered important for a hotel chain. This closely matches the result regarding the private hotels, obtained from those hotels.

The Finnish privately-owned hotels and hotel chains consider the service offer, the service encounter and company communication to be the most important factors in the formation of their company image. The price and the choice of intermediaries is seen important by some, but not to any great extent. None of the companies studied made a reference to the ecological nature of their activities.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the most important factors influencing the company image of a hotel chain or of an individual hotel are the personnel; the physical facilities; and the external communication effort, especially advertising.

8.3. Means of Influencing Image

It was assumed that the means used by hotel chains and individual hotels to create and maintain a company image would differ to some extent. This assumption was mainly due to the differences in size of

the companies, and, consequently, in the amount of money, and experience available in these companies.

Written communication is the most important means for both types of companies. The difference is that while individual hotels concentrate their efforts on brochures, hotel chains use advertising and posters, as well. In addition, most of the hotel chains participate in one or more international trade shows, while the privately-owned hotels do not consider them important.

Thus, the most important form of directly influencing the public is marketing communication, in particular advertising. Publicity or sponsorship are not widely used by the Finnish hotels or hotel chains in forming a company image.

8.4. International Clients

All of the research subjects were quite unanimous with regard to the most important international customer groups. Currently, the Nordic Countries, Central Europe, Russia and the Baltic States, and the USA are the most important sources of clients for the Finnish hotel. In the future, the importance of Northern Europe will diminish, while Russia and the Baltic Countries, Germany, the USA, and Japan are likely to grow in importance. Most of the hotel companies have taken this trend into consideration in their marketing and communication efforts.

8.5. Conclusion

The results show that there are no major differences between the independent hotels and the hotel chains in their image building activities. The limited use of certain methods of creating an international company image is an indication of the failure of most of

these hotel companies to use their resources to a full potential. While all of the hotel chains emphasized the importance of a strong company image, not all of them had an image building program. In addition, for some of these chains, the image had not been a conscious choice, but more of a given fact. Most of the private hotels have very restricted budgets, and their lack of an image building program can be more readily understood. These hotels seem to rely heavily on the membership in an international marketing chain as their image builder.

8.6. Suggestions for Further Study

In order to find out how successful the hotel companies are in their image building efforts, the customers would have to be studied. A study of the clients might give a different result as to what is important in image formation of hotels. It would be interesting to compare the results given by the hotel chains to those that the chain hotels would give, especially regarding the factors influencing their image. In addition, it might be of interest to discover how hotels, or other service companies, try to change a problematic international image.

Since nearly all of the important Finnish hotel chains were interviewed for this study, the picture formed of their activities is accurate. However, the number of the studied hotels remained quite low. Due to this, the weight of one hotel is very important in the study, which may cause distractions in the results. The answers given by the independent hotels were fairly similar, but a larger sample would have allowed for a larger generalization.

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RESPONDENTS

INTERVIEWS:

Hälvä, Jari, Marketing Manager, Best Western Finland, Helsinki,
December 1995.

Laine, Jari, Director of Hotel Division, Oy Restel Ltd., Helsinki,
December 1995.

Remes, Ulla, Marketing Manager, Finlandia-Hotels, Helsinki,
December 1995.

Saarelainen, Esa, Sales Group Leader, Arctia Hotel Partners Oy,
December 1995.

QUESTIONNAIRES:

Engberg, Mika, Hotel Manager, LordHotel, Helsinki,
December 1995.

Haatio-Leven, Kirsti, Hotel Director, Marttahotelli, Helsinki,
December 1995.

Spora, Risto, Hotel Manager, Hotel Finn, Helsinki,
December 1995.

Törmä, Kari, Sales Manager, Hotel Anna, Helsinki,
December 1995.

One hotel wished to remain anonymous.

Katariina Honkio
Ulvilantie 19c B 46
00350 HELSINKI

TRANSLATION FROM FINNISH

1.12.1995

N.N.
YKKÖSKETJU OY
PL 88
00101 HELSINKI

Dear Mr / Ms N

I am a student of International Business at the Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration. I am currently writing my master's thesis on the image creation efforts of the Finnish service companies.

I will be studying hotels and hotel chains. My intention is to compare these two groups: hotel chains and privately-owned hotels. By comparing the groups, and the means used by these companies in their image building, I aim to answer the question of how an international company image is created.

The study will be conducted by interviewing a selected number of companies. All of the results will be handled in complete confidence. If you wish, you have the possibility of receiving a short report of the results after the study is completed.

I sincerely wish that you will be able to assist me with my study. I will contact you in the near future, in order to fix a date for the interview.

Yours sincerely,

Katariina Honkio

Ystävällisin terveisin

Katariina Honkio
kauppatiet. yo

Katariina Honkio
Ulvilantie 19c B 46
00350 HELSINKI

1.12.1995

N.N.
YKKÖSKETJU OY
PL 88
00101 HELSINKI

Arvoisa vastaanottaja

Olen Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulun kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan opiskelija. Teen parhaillaan pro gradu-työtäni suomalaisten palveluyritysten kansainvälisen imagon luonnista.

Olen valinnut tutkimuskohteekseni hotellit ja hotelliketjut. Tarkoitukseni on vertailla kahta eri ryhmää, joista toisen muodostavat hotelliketjut ja toisen ketjuista riippumattomat hotellit. Ryhmiä ja niiden imagon luomisessa käyttämiä keinoja vertailemalla pyrin vastaamaan yleisellä tasolla kysymykseen siitä, miten kansainvälistä yritysimagea luodaan.

Kerään aineistoni haastatteluilla. Käsittelen saamani tulokset täysin luottamuksellisesti, eivätkä yksittäisen yrityksen tiedot tule missään vaiheessa kenenkään muun tietoon. Teillä on halutessanne mahdollisuus saada yhteenveto tutkimuksesta sen valmistuttua.

Toivon Teidän auttavan minua tutkimuksessani. Otan Teihin yhteyttä lähipäivinä haastatteluajan sopimiseksi.

Ystävällisin terveisin

Katariina Honkio
kauppatiet. yo

QUESTIONNAIRE 1 (HOTEL CHAINS)

COMPANY : _____

RESPONDENT & JOB TITLE: _____

NO OF CHAIN HOTELS IN FINLAND: _____

ABROAD: _____

HOTELS OWNED BY CHAIN : _____

PRIVATELY-OWNED : _____

.....

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF:

	Very important 5	4	3	2	Not important 1	?	0
International marketing chain							
Cooperation with the Finnish Tourist Board							
Regional brochures etc.							
Hotels' own marketing							
Cooperation with domestic transportation companies (VR, Finnair)							
Cooperation with foreign transportation companies							
Package holidays from abroad							
Cooperation with foreign travel agents							

TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE CHAIN HOTELS COOPERATE WITH THESE INDEPENDENTLY ?

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING CUSTOMER GROUPS TO YOUR COMPANY?

	Very important 5	4	3	2	Not important 1	? 0
Domestic business travelers						
Domestic vacationers						
Domestic conference travelers						
Foreign business travelers						
Foreign vacationers						
Foreign conference travelers						

WHICH COUNTRIES DO MOST OF YOUR VISITORS COME FROM? ____

AND IN THE FUTURE? _____

WHICH *INTERNATIONAL* IMAGE DO YOU STRIVE TO ACHIEVE?

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES TO YOUR DOMESTIC IMAGE? _____

ON WHAT BASIS HAS THIS IMAGE BEEN “CHOSEN” ? _____

WHICH FACTORS INFLUENCE THE IMAGE OF YOUR HOTEL CHAIN?

AND THAT OF AN INDIVIDUAL HOTEL? _____

WHAT MEANS DOES YOUR COMPANY USE TO CREATE ITS IMAGE IN FINLAND?

INTERNATIONALLY? _____

IF THERE ARE DIFFERENCES, WHY SO? _____

QUESTIONNAIRE 1 (HOTEL CHAINS)

KYSYMYSLOMAKE

YRITYKSEN NIMI: _____

VASTAAJAN NIMI JA ASEMA YRITYKSESSÄ: _____

KETJUN HOTELLIEN LKM SUOMESSA: _____

ULKOMAILLA: _____

KETJUN OMISTUKSESSA OLEVAT HOTELLIT : _____

YKSITYISOMISTUKSESSA OLEVAT (LKM) : _____

.....

KUINKA MERKITTÄVÄÄ KETJULLE ON YHTEISTYÖ:

	Hyvin tärkeää 5	4	3	2	Ei tärkeää 1	?
Kansainvälinen markkinointiketju						
Yhteistyö MEK:in kanssa						
Kaupunkiesitteet ym.						
Hotellien oma markkinointi						
Yhteistyö kotimaisten liikennöinti- yhtiöiden (VR, Finnair) kanssa						
Yhteistyö ulkomaisten liikennöinti- yhtiöiden (SAS ym.) kanssa						
Pakettimatkat ulkomailta						
Yhteistyö ulkomaisten matkatoimistojen kanssa						

MISSÄ MÄÄRIN YKSITTÄISET HOTELLIT TEKEVÄT ITSENÄISESTI
YHTEISTYÖTÄ NÄIDEN KANSSA (MINKÄ KANSSA)

KUINKA TÄRKEITÄ SEURAAVAT ASIAKASRYHMÄT OVAT YRITYKSELLENNE?

	Hyvin tärkeä				Ei tärkeä	?
	5	4	3	2	1	0
Kotimaiset liikematkustajat						
Kotimaiset lomailijat:						
Kotimaiset kokousmatkustajat						
Ulkomaiset liikematkustajat						
Ulkomaiset lomailijat:						
Ulkomaiset kokousmatkustajat						

MISTÄ MAISTA TULEE ENITEN VIERAITA? _____

MISTÄ ARVELETTE HEITÄ TULEVAISUUDESSA ENITEN TULEVAN?

MINKÄLAISTA IMAGOA *ULKOMAISTEN* ASIAKKAIDENNE KESKUUDESSA TAVOITTELETTE? _____

ONKO TÄLLÄ EROJA SUOMALaiseen IMAGOONNE? _____

MILLÄ PERUSTEELLA IMAGONNE ON "VALITTU"? _____

MITKÄ TEKIJÄT VAIKUTTAVAT MIELESTÄNNE KOKO KETJUNNE
IMAGOON? _____

ENTÄ YKSITTÄISEN HOTELLIN IMAGOON? _____

**MITÄ KEINOJA YRITYKSENNE KÄYTTÄÄ LUODESSAAN IMAGOA
KOTIMAASSA**

ULKOMAILLA? _____

JOS EROJA, NIIN MIKSI? _____

QUESTIONNAIRE 2 (HOTELS)

HOTEL: _____

RESPONDENT & JOB TITLE: _____

NUMBER OF ROOMS: _____

**IS YOUR HOTEL PRIVATELY-OWNED _____
OR OWNED BY A HOTEL CHAIN _____ ?**

**DOES YOUR HOTEL BELONG TO A MARKETING CHAIN IN FINLAND _____
INTERNATIONALLY _____ ?**

.....

**1. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES TO
YOUR HOTEL?**

	Very important				Not important		?
	5	4	3	2	1		0
Hotel services							
Restaurant							
Conference services							

2. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE TO THE ACTIVITIES OF YOUR HOTEL OF:

	Very important 5	4	3	2	Not important 1	?	0
Domestic marketing chain							
International marketing chain							
Cooperation with the Finnish Tourist Board							
Regional cooperation (brochures etc.)							
Own marketing							
Cooperation with domestic transportation companies (VR, Finnair)							
Cooperation with international transportation companies (SAS etc.)							
Package holidays from abroad							
Cooperation with foreign travel agents							

3. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING CUSTOMER GROUPS TO YOUR HOTEL?

	Very important 5	4	3	2	Not important 1	?	0
Domestic business travelers							
Domestic vacationers							
Domestic conference travelers							
Foreign business travelers							
Foreign vacationers							
Foreign conference travelers							

4a. FROM WHICH COUNTRIES DO YOU GET THE MOST VISITORS ?

b. AND IN THE FUTURE ?

5a. WHAT IMAGE DO YOU STRIVE TO ACHIEVE *INTERNATIONALLY* ?

5b. ARE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES TO YOUR DOMESTIC IMAGE ?__

6. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE TO YOUR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF:

	Very important 5	4	3	2	Not important 1	? 0
Size of personnel						
Friendliness of personnel						
Competence of personnel						
Size of rooms						
Furnishing of rooms						
Number of conference facilities						
Quality of conference facilities						
Number of restaurants						
Quality of restaurants						
Number of other services						
Quality of other services						
Location						
Membership in a chain						
Finnish character						
International character						
Advertising						
Image of other hotels in chain						
Logo						

7a. WHAT MEANS DO YOU USE IN YOUR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE CREATION?

	Very important				Not important	?
	5	4	3	2	1	0
Domestic trade shows						
International trade shows						
Own brochures						
Chain brochures						
Regional brochures						
Domestic travel agents' brochures						
Foreign travel agents' brochures						
Advertising in foreign newspapers						
“ foreign travel magazines						
“ foreign business papers						
“ foreign magazines						
Customer card						
Personal letters						
Sponsorship in Finland						
“ internationally						
Articles in foreign newspapers						
“ foreign travel magazines						
“ foreign business papers						
“ foreign magazines						

7b ARE THERE DIFFERENCES TO THE DOMESTICALLY-USED MEANS? HOW & WHY?

QUESTIONNAIRE 2 (HOTELS)

KYSYMYSLOMAKE

HOTELLIN NIMI: _____

NIMENNE JA ASEMANNE: _____

HOTELLINNE HUONELUKU: _____

ONKO HOTELLINNE YKSITYISEN OMISTAMA _____
VAI KETJUN OMISTUKSESSA _____

KUULUUKO HOTELLINNE MARKKINOINTIKETJUUN SUOMESSA _____
KANSAINVÄLISESTI _____

.....

**1. KUINKA TÄRKEÄN OSAN SEURAAVAT TOIMINNOT MUODOSTAVAT
HOTELLISSANNE?**

	Hyvin tärkeä 5	4	3	2	Ei tärkeä 1	? 0
Hotellipalvelut						
Ravintolapalvelut						
Kokouspalvelut						

2. KUINKA TÄRKEÄÄ HOTELLINNE TOIMINNALLE ON:

	Hyvin tärkeää				Ei tärkeää	?
	5	4	3	2	1	0
Kotimainen markkinointiketju						
Kansainvälinen markkinointiketju						
Yhteistyö MEK:in kanssa						
Alueellinen yhteistyö (esitteet ym)						
Oma markkinointi						
Yhteistyö kotimaisten liikennöinti- yhtiöiden (VR, Finnair) kanssa						
Yhteistyö ulkomaisten liikennöinti- yhtiöiden (SAS ym.) kanssa						
Pakettimatkat ulkomailta						
Yhteistyö ulkomaisten matkatoimistojen kanssa						

3. KUINKA TÄRKEITÄ SEURAAVAT ASIAKASRYHMÄT OVAT
HOTELLILLENNE?

	Hyvin tärkeä				Ei tärkeä	?
	5	4	3	2	1	0
Kotimaiset liikematkustajat						
Kotimaiset lomailijat						
Kotimaiset kokousmatkustajat						
Ulkomaiset liikematkustajat						
Ulkomaiset lomailijat						
Ulkomaiset kokousmatkustajat						

4a. MISTÄ MAISTA TULEE ENITEN VIERAITA ? _____

b. MISTÄ ARVELETTE HEITÄ TULEVAISUUDESSA ENITEN TULEVAN ?

5a. MINKÄLAISTA IMAGOA *ULKOMAISTEN* ASIAKKAIDENNE
KESKUUDESSA TAVOITTELETTE?

5b. ONKO TÄLLÄ EROJA KOTIMAISEEN IMAGOOHNE? _____

6. KUINKA TÄRKEÄ OSATEKIJÄ *KANSAINVÄLISESSÄ*
YRITYSKUVASSANNE ON:

	Hyvin tärkeä 5	4	3	2	Ei tärkeä 1	? 0
Henkilöstön koko						
Henkilöstön palvelualttius						
Henkilöstön osaaminen						
Huoneiden koko						
Huoneiden sisustus						
Kokoustilojen määrä						
Kokoustilojen laatu						
Ravintolapalvelujen määrä						
Ravintolapalvelujen laatu						
Muiden oheispalvelujen määrä						
Muiden oheispalvelujen laatu						
Sijainti						
Ketjun jäsenyys						
Suomalaisuus						
Kansainvälisyys						
Mainonta						
Ketjun muiden hotellien imago						
Logo						

7a. MITÄ KEINOJA YRITYKSENNE KÄYTTÄÄ LUODESSAAN IMAGOA ULKOMAILLA ?

	Hyvin tärkeä				Ei tärkeä		?
	5	4	3	2	1		0
Messut (kotim.)							
Messut (ulkom.)							
Omat esitteet							
Ketjun esitteet							
Alueelliset esitteet							
Kotim. matkanjärjestäjien esitteet							
Ulkom. matkanjärj. esitteet							
Mainonta ulkom. sanomalehdissä							
“ ulkom. matkailulehdissä							
“ ulkom. talouslehdissä							
“ ulkom. aikakauslehdissä							
Kanta-asiakaskortti, -edut ym.							
Kirjeet asiakkaille							
Sponsorointi kotimaassa							
“ ulkomailla							
Artikkelit ulkom. sanomalehdissä							
“ ulkom. matkailulehdissä							
“ ulkom. talouslehdissä							
“ ulkom. aikakauslehdissä							

7b EROAVATKO KÄYTETYT KEINOT KOTIMAASSA KÄYTETYISTÄ, MITEN JA MIKSI ? _____

Lämmin kiitos vastauksestanne!! Kysymyslomake pyydetään palauttamaan **22.12.** mennessä oheisessa palautuskuoressa. (Katariina Honkio, Ulvilantie 19c B 46, HKI 35).

Haluan yhteenvedon tutkimuksesta sen valmistuttua _____ En halua yhteenvetoa _____